

VZCZCXRO7192
OO RUEHLH RUEHPW
DE RUEHIL #0481 0321232
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 011232Z FEB 08
FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4808
INFO RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 8104
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 7163
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 2736
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 8817
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 4718
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 3407
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS ISLAMABAD 000481

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PK](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: AITZAZ AHSAN FREED FROM HOUSE ARREST

11. (U) Summary: On January 31, Aitzaz Ahsan, the Supreme Court Bar Association president, was released after 90 days of detention in his Lahore home. Former Chief Justice Iftikar Chaudhry released a letter rebuffing President Musharraf's criticisms. Lawyers and civil rights activists around Pakistan celebrated "Iftikar Day" in honor of the detained Chief Justice and others who have remained in detention since the proclamation of emergency on November 3. End summary.

12. (U) After 90 days of house arrest, Supreme Court Bar Association President Aitzaz Ahsan was released by the Punjab provincial government on January 31. There then followed some confusion when new detention orders were released and then withdrawn within two hours of their issuance. According to Pakistan's constitution, the government can hold persons in preventative detention for 90 days; thereafter, they must convene a judicial hearing where the suspect can defend him/herself. The Punjab government apparently decided not to convene that hearing. The same law applies to the other two detained lawyers, Ali Ahmed Kurd and Tariq Mahmood, whose detentions orders we believe expire on February 4. Also on January 31 before news of Ahsan's release, opposition members of the Senate staged a walkout to protest his continued detention under house arrest.

13. (U) In a seven-page diatribe addressed to several heads of state who met with President Musharraf recently, deposed Justice Iftikar Chaudhry accused Musharraf of slander. Chaudhry rebutted Musharraf's criticism of his actions on the bench and after he was suspended, claiming his rallies were non-political. He lambasted Musharraf for firing the judiciary and suspending the constitution and complained that his continued house arrest was illegal.

14. (U) On January 31, lawyers across Pakistan observed "Iftikar Day" and held rallies in the major cities, protesting the detention of many of their brethren, including the former Chief Justice. Demonstrations took place at the Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Lahore Bar Associations, and an effigy of President Musharraf was torched outside the "subjail" where Chaudhry is being held. Lawyers boycotted court proceedings at the Sindh High Court in Karachi, where former senior Supreme Court Justice Bhagwandas addressed a crowd, assuring the group that the lawyers' struggle will soon succeed and an independent judiciary will soon be restored. (Shortly after his address, Bhagwandas was redetained at his house as he attempted to leave for another rally in Islamabad.) Former Supreme Court Bar Association president Munir Malik also pledged to the crowd that their

struggle will continue and that the lawyers movement will "besiege" the Parliament after the February 18 elections if changes are not made. In Quetta, lawyers protested at the home of Ali Ahmed Kurd.

PATTERSON